

Griffin Beverage's St. Ignace Warehouse Recognized for 'Green' Design

2011-05-19 / News

By Matt Mikus



Ryan Bird of Griffin Beverage drives a new forklift that runs solely on battery power, instead of the industry standard propane. The two forklifts are plugged in every night to recharge the batteries, and it lowers the amount of carbon emissions released into the warehouse. It is a welcome addition to the LEEDcertified building, Mr. Bird added, because "we don't have to deal with the fumes." If you drive by the new Griffin Beverage Company warehouse outside of St. Ignace, located on Old Portage Trail just off of US-2, you may not realize the building is special. But it turns out that the forest green, 20,000-square-foot warehouse is one of the most energy efficient buildings in the state, making it "green" in more than just its façade.

The warehouse is the first LEED-certified beverage distribution warehouse in Michigan, receiving recognition in March.

"This project was totally different," said Bob Griffin, Jr., general manager of Griffin Beverage Company, "from the first scoop of dirt to everything else. We outgrew our previous location and we needed a new one, so we put all the latest and greatest into the new location."



The staff at the Griffin Beverage in St. Ignace, Manager Mike Kamyszek (from left), Patty Martin, Lance Tremblay, Glen Steiner, Ryan Bird (on forklift), and Bill Tamlyn, show off the new warehouse, designed for energy efficiency. Built in 2010, the warehouse received LEED certification for its design and implementation of energy and environmental saving design and practices. The lights inside the warehouse are motion sensitive, reducing the amount of energy needed to operate the new building. Missing from the photograph is Phil Schnicke. The certification is an internationally recognized standard for construction and building sustainability. The LEED building rating system, developed by the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council, is designed to promote construction practices and building designs that increase profitability while reducing environmental impact. The council is a coalition of building industry leaders based in Washington, D.C.

Earning certification requires a new approach to many aspects of building, including interior design and lighting efficiency. Everything from location, building materials, paints, and plumbing was considered in evaluating the new facility. Construction crews and contractors have to be local, to reduce energy use from commuting long distances.

Griffin Beverage invested \$1 million in the new facility, and focused on making the building as energy efficient as possible. The new warehouse is about 35% more energy efficient than the smaller, 13,000-square-foot old facility on Reagon Street.

Building materials for the warehouse were purchased locally, recycled, or bought for efficiency in energy use.

Stone sidings for the office came from the Upper Peninsula, and decorative lumber from northern Michigan for the walls. Interior windows are made from recycled glass from old beer cooler doors. The exterior windows are designed to allow a specific amount of light through, to maximize ambient light while reducing the electricity used inside. The ventilation system also cycles clean air through to help regulate temperature.

Those are just the improvements to the office.

The warehouse roof is made with materials designed to reduce the amount of heat reflected, helping to reduce impacts to climate change. The roof also uses skylights to help illuminate the warehouse.

The technology used in the warehouse is designed for minimal environmental impact. All of the lighting is motion-activated, turning off after about five minutes of inactivity. Each light will turn on separately when someone walks under the light, illuminating only the path the workers walk, instead of the entire room.

“You really get used to it,” said Mike Kamyszek, manager of the warehouse. “It just becomes part of the everyday routine.”

The cooling systems only fully operate during the warmer months, using natural temperatures to keep beverages cool during the winter. The cooler also uses a quick-close door that seals in the cool air, reducing the amount of energy needed to keep beverages cold.

The two forklifts are electric, which reduces exhaust fumes and barely hums when it accelerates, unlike most forklifts, that run on propane.

Located on both forklifts is a remote sensor, which opens the cooler doors when in close proximity. This keeps the door from opening by accident, which also keeps the temperature low in the cooler.

The new warehouse also promotes a healthy alternative to getting to work, with a bicycle rack and shower for employees to use before work.

“It’s a direction we’ve moved to for the last 15 to 20 years,” Mr. Griffin said. “Instead of going with the normal, we take the time to look into new technology, see if it’s beneficial, and do research to see if it works for us.”

The St. Ignace facility, which employs seven people, is the newest for Griffin Beverage. The beverage distribution company serves the Eastern and Central Upper Peninsula, as well as northern lower Michigan as far south as Shiawassee County.